

global war against terrorism demands that we work with many governments willing to help. In building these partnerships, it is our moral duty and in our national interest to advance democratic principles.

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STOPPING THE ROT—USING WESTERN
INFLUENCE IN CENTRAL ASIA

CENTRAL ASIA: DEMOCRACY AND THE SPORT OF
GEOPOLITICS

On HIS tour this week of Central Asia, Donald Rumsfeld, America's defense secretary, thanked the region's leaders warmly for their contribution to the war in Afghanistan. They had opened up their roads, railways, air corridors and military bases. And they had been only too happy to help. The Taliban and the armed Islamists they spawned had menaced each one of these fragile new states. Yet fostering new military relationships, important as these are, should not be the only aim of western policy. Development and better government are needed too.

Kazakhstan, for example, looks set to become one of the world's top oil producers. Yet evidence from other places suggests that oil money can badly distort an economy as it travels the short distance between western buyers and the offshore bank accounts of cynical rulers. Outsiders can help guard against that danger by keeping up pressure in these former outposts of Soviet rule for more open societies, where the strains of wrenching change can be absorbed by a healthy degree of press freedom and political debate.

Instead, in Kazakhstan and in Kirgizstan, the two most committed until recently to market economics and multi-party democracy, there have been arbitrary arrests and a crackdown on the independent media. Meanwhile Uzbekistan, which aspires to be the regional cop, has always had an authoritarian tinge. No bad thing, some outsiders would say, when there are unruly borders to guard and a real threat from Islamist extremists. But leaders in all three places have clearly taken their new-found strategic importance as an opportunity to turn the screws on dissenters.

Meanwhile Tajikistan and Turkmenistan offer cautionary tales of the trouble that could infect the whole area if the outside world turns a blind eye. For most of its first decade of independence, Tajikistan was mired in a drug-fueled civil war that still has disastrous effects: Tajiks play a key role in transporting Afghan heroin to Europe. In Turkmenistan, a sterile personality cult has fostered poverty and human-rights abuses; the country at one point flirted with the Taliban, and has failed to exploit or market its huge gas reserves effectively.

Tempting as it might sometimes seem for western governments to shrug off Central Asia's creeping, authoritarianism as a price worth paying in the bigger geopolitical and financial game, that would be short-sighted—for pragmatic reasons as well as for moral ones. Tyrannies with unhappy subjects are unlikely to be reliable economic or strategic partners. Where people conclude—as some already have—that America and its allies care about nothing except oil revenues and military bases, the West can come to seem the source of their travails, and they become easy converts to extremism. Once anti-western sentiment has taken hold, it can then be cynically exploited by local despots (even those with cosy relationships with the West) to distract attention from their own misdeeds.

What can western governments do? They cannot turn the Region's leaders into paragons of democracy. Heavy-handed pressure,

applied to tough rulers still jealous of their newly-won independence, can be counter-productive.

Western governments would do better to give a helping hand to those courageous individuals who are working to keep the flame of independent thought flickering. Often the best deliverers of such help are not embassies or visiting politicians, but non-governmental agencies. Tiny amounts of money—a printing press here, an internet-linked computer there—can make the difference between survival or extinction for a local party or lobby group.

ENCOURAGEMENT WHERE IT COUNTS

To advocates of cold realism in foreign policy, such concerns may smack of sentimentalism. As long as Central Asia's rulers open their airfields to western military planes and their oilfields to western corporations, does it matter very much if they lock up their rivals or use electrodes on their dissidents?

Such arguments were once used to justify America's unconditional support for the monarchy in Iran. When opposition there finally burst into the open, it was not inspired by western models but was driven by anti-western rage. These days technology makes it even harder to maintain repressive regimes and stamp down dissent. Ideas cross frontiers more easily, no matter how hard tyrants try to prevent this. Another good reason for western governments not to collude with creeping authoritarianism in Central Asia, but to use their influence to stop the rot.

TRIBUTE TO MAX AND OLGA
VENZOR ON THEIR 50TH WED-
DING ANNIVERSARY

HON. SILVESTRE REYES

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, October 16, 2002

Mr. REYES. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor the sacrament of marriage by paying tribute to two of my constituents who will be celebrating their 50th Wedding Anniversary over the upcoming Thanksgiving weekend. Margarito and Olga Venzor have been dedicated to each other for fifty years and we should all be inspired to know that marriage, in this day and age, is very much alive and well. They were married in 1952 and never looked back.

Max and Olga have been examples to their community, church, and family. They have been examples of love, dedication, and sacrifice. They are the parents to eight wonderful and beautiful children: Danny, David, Lionel, Lilly, Rose, Chris, Becky and Bertie. They also have and cherish 17 grandchildren. I won't even attempt to name them. I also hear that they will be adding another grandchild to their *familia* in the Spring. Max and Olga are also blessed to have two great grandchildren. As a new grandfather myself, and also coming from a large family, I know what a blessing it is and a true gift from God to be surrounded by loved ones.

One of the things that has remained constant over the past 50 years, has been the love and dedication that has been felt and shown between Max and Olga. Even when times got tough, as they often did, they were able to keep their marriage strong and their commitment to each other and their children

solid. They sacrificed of themselves for each other and truly lived up to their marriage vows. They sacrificed to make sure that their kids and each other were educated, and clothed, and fed, and happy, and nourished, and safe, and loved. These things, in the grand scheme of things, are the most important successes in life. They have shared life's joys and tragedies together and have been with each other through each other's accomplishments, trials and tribulations. They have shared each other's aspirations, disappointments, fears, and challenges. They have literally grown up together and have beautifully grown old with one another. What a wonderful, spiritual blessing.

I think the place where Max and Olga find themselves as they approach their 50th Wedding Anniversary, is the place and the situation where we all want to be and what so many married couples aspire to achieve. Fifty years of marriage! One of the keys to their success has been keeping God at the center of their marriage, relationship, and family. God is truly the glue that holds the sacred institution of marriage together and Max and Olga are witness to this fact. I know that the Catholic Church continues to be a central and important part of their lives. In fact, for many years, they have served as Eucharistic lay ministers to the family of Saint Joseph's Catholic Church, in El Paso, Texas.

When it really comes down to it, there is no greater accomplishment in life than to have loved fully, your spouse, your children, your God, and your country. Max and Olga have certainly done just that and I applaud them on their 50th Wedding Anniversary. I wish them great happiness, peace, and joy in the upcoming years.

A PROCLAMATION IN MEMORY OF
JOHN E. PLATT

HON. ROBERT W. NEY

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, October 16, 2002

Mr. NEY. Mr. Speaker, I hereby offer my heartfelt condolences to the family and friends of John E. Platt, who passed away September 24, 2002. John Platt was born on July 11, 1920, in Eastern Ohio. Mr. Platt was a devoted family man. He and his wife, Margeret Esther Morse, raised 5 children and were the proud grandparents of 19 grandchildren and 17 great-grandchildren.

Mr. Platt served our country as a member of both the Navy and the Air Force. For his service as a World War II and Korean War veteran, we owe him a debt of gratitude that can never be repaid. Following retirement from the armed forces, Mr. Platt generously gave of his time teaching high school history and serving as Principal in the Carrollton Exempted School District. His devotion to the community was impeccable, being a dedicated patriot through his 25 year membership in the VFW and Voice of Democracy Program, as well as his work for the Lions International, POW-MIA's, and the American Legion. He was also involved throughout his life with the Chestnut Ridge United Methodist Church.

Mr. Platt will certainly be remembered by all those who knew him for his personal sacrifices of time and energy to family, friends, and community. His understanding and caring shown